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ILLINOIS MANUFACTURING EXTENSION CENTER (IMEC) IMEC's 35 full-time engineering, technology and business management professionals are located at thirteen offices throughout the state. Services range from process improvement to waste management, quality assurance to lean manufacturing. Contact: Robert Weinstein, 1501 W. Bradley Avenue, Peoria, IL 61625, (888) 806-4632, Fax: (309) 677-3289, Email: riw@riw@imec1.org, Website: <http://www.imec1.org>

THE MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP IN ILLINOIS

Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) is a nationwide system of services and support for smaller manufacturers to become more globally competitive. At the heart of the system is a network of affiliated, locally-based manufacturing extension centers. Each center, like IMEC, is a partnership, typically involving federal, state, and local governments; industry; educational institutions; and other sources of expertise, information and funding support.

COMPANY CLIPS

Iron-A-Way's Growth Strategies Gain Steam With ISO

Iron-A-Way is a manufacturer of built-in ironing centers for customers in the residential, hotel, and condominium markets, as well as for the military and correctional institutions. The company, located in Morton, exports its product to international markets with the help of less than 50 employees.

Iron-A-Way conceived a strategic vision of taking the company to a new level in order to meet future manufacturing needs and provide evidence of a higher quality standard. To meet its goals, the company needed to improve many of its business practices, including its product documentation, documented quality system, and technology to give architects electronic access to product specifications. The company enlisted the help of the Illinois Manufacturing Extension Center (IMEC) on a number of strategic initiatives.

IMEC immediately set Iron-A-Way on the path to ISO registration. The company participated in an ISO/QS 9000 Preparation Network, earned registration, and upgraded its quality systems to the ISO 9000:2000 standard. To address other areas of concern, IMEC completed basic piece part and assembly drawings of all Iron-A-Way's products and assisted in converting them to electronic (AutoCAD) format, allowing the product to be integrated into the company's web site. IMEC also completed three-part CSI specs. Now, when architects prepare construction drawings, they can drag and drop Iron-A-Way CAD drawings and download the required CSI specs, saving them time and giving Iron-A-Way a huge advantage over the competition. The company saved nearly \$500,000 and is anticipating a substantial increase in sales thanks to this project.

Continued

STATE STATS

DATA* COVERS JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2001

Number of projects completed
with firms
796

Number of firms served
516

Number of firms served for
the first time
209

Federal cost share for current
operating year
\$2,108,700

State/other cost share for current
operating year
\$4,217,400

**Data as reported from center*

DATA** COVERS JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2001

Increased sales & retained sales
\$100,471,381

Client capital investment
\$16,453,000

Total cost savings
\$8,036,141

Jobs (created & retained)
606

***Source: Independent client impact survey*



ABA Of America Clamps Down On Quality

ABA of America, located in Rockford, manufactures hose clamps for the automotive industry. The company currently has 12 employees.

ABA of America faced a challenge familiar to suppliers to the “Big Three” automakers: become quality certified or lose business. For the past several years, auto manufacturers have been requiring their critical suppliers to improve operational efficiency, eliminate defects and waste, and reduce product cost. Registration to the ISO/QS 9000 standard is a universally accepted way to ensure that a company’s products and processes meet strict quality guidelines. Smaller manufacturers, however, are often dissuaded from pursuing ISO/QS 9000 registration because of the time it takes and resources (financial and personnel) it requires. Determined to retain the business of the country’s largest auto manufacturers, ABA turned to the Illinois Manufacturing Extension Center (IMEC) at Rock Valley College for assistance.

IMEC specialists led ABA through the entire quality registration process, from developing internal documentation and work procedures to selection of the registrar. As a result of IMEC’s efforts, ABA achieved ISO 9002 registration in a little over eight months. The benefits—increased output and tighter controls over its processes—have been dramatic. Sales have increased by 30 percent and ABA is now in a position to retain business from key automotive customers such as Chrysler and Navistar.